

FALL 2004 CHINA DOCUMENTARY FILM SERIES

Sponsored by the Council on East Asian Studies at Yale University



**Showcasing Films from
REC Foundation's REEL CHINA Documentary Festival 2004**

HENRY R. LUCE HALL AUDITORIUM, 34 HILLHOUSE AVENUE

All screenings begin at 7:00 PM and have English subtitles

FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

OCTOBER 5, 2004

MARRIAGE

Director: Liang Bibo, 80 minutes, 1999

In a village in the Qinling Mountains of Shaanxi Province, marriage is still a matter carried out in a very traditional manner following the so-called "six procedures." This film captures the story of two couples going through the marriage process over the period of nearly a year, from the first proposal to the actual wedding. The matchmaker stands out as an indispensable character throughout the nuptial process.

OLD YANG SEEKING WIFE

Director: Jiang Ning, Camera: Li Lie, 76 minutes, 2003

By the end of 2001, the number of senior citizens in Shanghai had exceeded 2.466 million, amounting to 18.58% of the total population, of which 980,000 were single. Statistics show that over 20% of single seniors had the will to seek a companion. According to one Chinese saying, young couples should accompany each other to old age. Unfortunately, not everyone shares this luck and for the aging population in China, loneliness is an ever-growing concern. This story follows a group of senior citizens in Shanghai. The protagonist of the story, Old Yang, is an ordinary elderly man who is suffering from an extreme sense of loneliness. This documentary film recounts Old Yang's story in seeking a wife and depicts the reality of getting old in urban China. The story provides insights into the lives of senior citizens in China and their attitudes towards wedlock at old age.

OCTOBER 12, 2004

DV CHINA

Director: Zheng Dasheng, 92 minutes, 2002

Since the early 90s, the villagers in Jindezheng, led by Zhou Yuanqiang, creative director of the local cultural center, have learned all the techniques of film production: script writing, casting, shooting, montage, and even special effects. With great enthusiasm, they have already produced 18 serials even though they lack equipment and have a very limited budget. The energetic director Zhou Yuanqiang initiates a new challenge for his enthusiastic and amateur actors: their first Kung-fu serial. This documentary follows the production of the new serial and their difficulties in fund raising, resolving technical problems, and interpersonal relations amongst themselves.

DANCE WITH FARM WORKERS

Director: Wu Wenguang, Camera: Su Ming, 57 minutes, 2001

This film is about an unconventional performance named “Dance with Farm Workers.” The project involved not only 10 actors and dancers, but also 30 farm workers who came from poor regions of Sichuan Province and worked in construction sites in Beijing. The performance was initiated and organized by choreographer Wen Hui, artists Song Dong, Yin Xiuzhen, and Wu Wenguang. Both the rehearsal and the performance took place in a production hall of a former textile factory that was soon to be torn down as part of Beijing’s rapid modernization. These strong farm laborers, who came to the city after losing hope in their rural home towns, can be considered the one of the supporting pillars of China’s modernization. At first, the farm laborers were only concerned about getting paid 30 Yuan a day for their efforts (approximately U.S. \$3.60). Later they discover that the lowest of “the lower class” could be standing at center stage and making a statement.

OCTOBER 19, 2004

SAN YUAN LI

Directors: Ou Ning and Cao Fei, 44 minutes, 2003 (*Black & White*)

This is a case study of a typical village-amid-the-city phenomenon in the process of the urbanization of Guangzhou presented by Ou Ning and Cao Fei under the commission of the 50th Venice Biennale. This work samples San Yuan Li Village. The crew penetrates San Yuan Li Village as “City Flaneur,” rethinking back into the depth of its history, the confrontation and reconciliation between the process of modernization, and the patriarchal clan system, as well as the rural community system in Guangdong. The bizarre architectures and views of humanity have been captured, all encapsulated into this black and white cine-poem.

TOWN MIGRATION

Director: Gou Xizhi, 94 minutes, 1999

Datong is a 2,000-year old ancient town. The municipal government intends to reconstruct the town which means that the locals on Herui Old Street will have to move as their houses are slated to be torn down. There are many reasons that the local people oppose this move, but most explain that they cherish the past of Herui Old Street and do not have enough money to build a new house. For local officials, migration and reconstruction are irreversible stipulations. The film depicts the see-saw battle between the government and town locals and presents a view of how common people strive for their own rights in an ancient town in China.

OCTOBER 26, 2004

GRANDPA JING AND HIS OLD CUSTOMERS

Director: Shi Runjiu, 55 minutes, 2003

Grandpa Jing is about to celebrate his 87th birthday. He is the most constant man. For his entire life, he has lived in the Shishahai District - the heart of the old Beijing - where he has been a barber for 70 years. Before 1949, Grandpa Jing owned a small barber shop on the commercial street of Di'anmen. Today, in spite of his old age, he continues to cut hair and shave beards. Instead of working his scissors in the barber shop, he now offers in-house service for his customers.

THE EMPTY CAGE

Director: Jiang Zhi, 25 minutes, 2002

This film depicts the story of two ordinary days in Shenzhen, one day in which a peculiar little girl wanders in the city and the other in which the director tries to find her.

ABING IN 1950

Director: Qian Hengqing, 35 minutes, 2001

Abing (1893-1950) was a famous blind Chinese folk musician. Three months before his death in 1950, he had 6 pieces of his music recorded with a steel-wired recorder. The music was played by Abing himself, and the recording was achieved with the help of musician friends from his youth. Such a simple and short recording became a very important event in the musical history of China. One of the recorded pieces, *The Two Springs Mirror the Moon*, is now considered a classic. Created during the composer's dozens of years of vagrant life, this work is regarded as the portraiture of Abing. In addition, this work is now performed by the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra and the Lyons Symphony Orchestra. When the great conductor Seiji Ozawa listened to the piece performed on the *erhu*, he couldn't help but burst into tears and kneel down on the ground. In this documentary film, reappearance is adopted as a creative means to tell this hardly-known story from over fifty years ago of the only known recording taken during Abing's lifetime.

WHO'S LISTENING TO MY SONG

Director: Mao Jie, 25 minutes, 2003

The rock-and-roll band “Stone” comes from Xinjiang, a distant province in western China. They came to Beijing in 1997 to try their luck in the music scene and have established themselves as one of the most vigorous and creative bands in China. They live a hard life by performing in Beijing’s underground bars. No matter how hard it turns out to be, they live an independent life.

NOVEMBER 2, 2004

ELECTION DAY – NO FILM SCREENINGS

NOVEMBER 9, 2004

THE SUN IN WINTER

Director: Zhao Gang, 76 minutes, 2002

By the end of 20th century, the political system in rural China was evolving towards “democratic” autonomy at the village level. This was after having undergone the countryside gentleman’s administration system, the *baojia* system, the local autonomy system, the people’s commune system, and the household contract responsibility system respectively over the past centuries and millennia. It was winter during the Year of the Tiger when the revised Villager’s Committee Organization Law was issued. Three thousand villagers of Dong Puo Village voluntarily elected village representatives to select the candidate for the Villager Committee. This film depicts a village in western China as a single case study, adopting the method of observing and recording events over a three year period. The film reflects the unique course of “democratic” autonomy that several hundreds of millions of Chinese farmers have encountered in the complex environment of rural politics, economy, and culture.

THE SECRET OF MY SUCCESS

Director: Duan Jingchuan, 73 minutes, 2002

Mr. Lu Guohua is the managing official for the Family Planning and Birth Control Office in Fansheng Village whose major responsibility is to enforce the “one-child-policy.” This position is not easy and it often attracts hateful and vengeful acts from the villagers. Highly respected though, Lu has been in this position for fourteen years and has never run into any troubles other than the occasional fist fight. In 2001, Lu gets into trouble as a family member in his ward gives birth to a third child, thus violating the strict national and local regulations. Following the incident, his previously excellent relationship with the head of the village, Li Zhongqin, rapidly turns sour. That same year happens to be election year in Fansheng Village and a couple of tricks on the part of Lu, soon put an end to Li’s hopes for re-election for his fourth term in office.

NOVEMBER 16, 2004

LEAVE ME ALONE

Director: Hu Shu, 70 minutes, 2001

Ye and her sister, Yang, work in a karaoke night club while their friend, Massagal, is a massage girl in a “barber shop” which is frequented by male customers, few of whom are there for a haircut. This film tells the story of three young prostitutes in a southern city in China. Today, girls such as Ye, Yang, and Massagal are particularly despised and abandoned by society. They are regarded as a kind of commodity that can simply be bought with money. Nobody really cares about the future.

WALK-ON ROLES

Director: Zhu Chuanming, 75 minutes, 2002

This film depicts the life of a gang of young urban slackers. They proclaim themselves as movie walk-on roles, but always kill time in front of the gate of Beijing Film Studio. After “work,” they return to their rented and shabby shack on the outskirts of town and spend the nights flirting with naive girls, telling filthy jokes, playing cards, and watching videos. Li Wenbo, Bao Hehua, and Wang Gang dream of the success of their movies and the millions of dollars they might earn, but every time they think about their next meal or their rent, they sink into the stark reality of their situation.

NOVEMBER 23, 2004

ALONG THE RAILWAY

Director: Du Haibin, 98 minutes, 2001

It was winter of 2000 in Baoji City of Shanxi Province when this documentary was first shot. A group of waifs and strays are playing on the dump ground of the railway station. These new peripheral people of modern China come from all over the country. In the daytime, they wander in the city and in the evening they sleep along railways. To make a living, they glean and collect scraps or empty bottles to sell for a few bucks. Among them, Zhou Fu has drifted to Baoji City because he has lost his money and ID card; Li Xiaolong and Huo Hongchang escaped from a Detention Center for Street Kids; Xiao Yunnan had been maltreated by his former boss; Feng Xiang decided to run away from home because of a forced marriage imposed by his parents. They spend the first Chinese Lunar New Year in the new century as a big “family” reorganized along the railway.

NOVEMBER 30, 2004

OUT OF PHOENIX BRIDGE

Director: Li Hong, 90 minutes, 1997 - *Ogawa Shinsuke Prize, Award of Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival, 1997, Japan*

Four girls from the countryside live in a tiny cramped room in Beijing. Long hours of hard work and miserable living conditions turn out to be the happiest years of their lives when they enjoy the most freedom. This prize-winning film follows their rising and falling hopes and dreams as they reluctantly return to the closed world of their hometowns and future husbands.

REEL CHINA Documentary Festival is an independent film festival which presents the most outstanding contemporary documentaries produced in China. The festival takes place every two or three years in New York City and other major cities in the United States.

The REC Foundation is a non-for-profit organization founded in New York in 1997 with the purpose of promoting cultural exchange programs between the East and the West. Since its founding, the REC Foundation has conducted research on and followed the development of contemporary Chinese documentaries. The Foundation is in contact with documentary filmmakers throughout China and has selected their best and most representative films for their film festivals.

In October 2001, the first REEL CHINA Documentary Festival was held in New York, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts and Colorado. About 26 documentaries made between 1995 and 2001 were screened and received a warm and enthusiastic response from audiences. Among the screening venues were the New York Public Library, Downtown Community TV Center, Columbia University, New York University, and Yale University. The REEL CHINA Program was also introduced by Time Warner Cable Manhattan Channel 34 in December 2001.

With the rapid and profound change in China's society, Chinese documentaries have never been as dynamic and full of vitality as they are today. Contemporary Chinese documentaries have gained worldwide acclaim for their realism, depth, and artistry. Documentaries record the experiences and travails of common people – particularly the most humble members of society – in this period of great change in China's economy, culture, and institutions. They reveal the unpredictability in people's lives and their resilience and self-reliance in the face of change.

A new generation of producers and independent filmmakers has started to shape the documentary film scene with stories that have never been allowed before in China. From countryside to city, from inland areas to coastal areas, from remote regions to central regions, from inner systems to outer systems, from state enterprises to private enterprises, people with different origins, statuses, and goals eventually converge into a dynamic society. Viewers of these documentaries can see how social change in China is transforming a previously closed and static system of social organization into a more open market-driven one. Many of the selections not only record an event or a story, they also reveal the internal psychological tensions individuals face in adapting to a changing social environment. Viewers of this series of documentaries can witness the unfolding reality of contemporary Chinese history from many different perspectives.

For the latest information about the REEL CHINA Documentary Festival 2004 or the REC Foundation, please contact:

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